

Pre-Visit Worksheet for “How the West was . . .” Grade 7-8
Montana Historical Society

Manifest Destiny

Define the term “Manifest Destiny”:

True or False: To understand Manifest Destiny, it's important to understand the United States' need and desire to expand. Answer true or false to whether the following points illustrate some of the economic, social and political pressures promoting U.S. expansion:

_____ The United States was experiencing a periodic high birth rate and increases in population due to immigration. And because agriculture provided the primary economic structure, large families to work the farms were considered an asset. The U.S. population grew from more than 5 million in 1800 to more than 23 million by 1850. Thus, there was a need to expand into new territories to accommodate this rapid growth.

_____ The United States suffered two economic depressions -- one in 1818 and a second in 1839. These crises drove some people to seek their living in frontier areas.

_____ Frontier land was inexpensive or, in some cases, free.

_____ Expansion into frontier areas opened opportunities for new commerce and individual self-advancement.

_____ Land ownership was associated with wealth and tied to self-sufficiency, political power and independent "self-rule."

_____ Maritime merchants saw an opportunity to expand and promote new commerce by building West Coast ports leading to increased trade with countries in the Pacific.



“The painting “Columbia” by John Gast is an interesting symbolic portrayal of Manifest Destiny. It shows the great American angel or woman, floating over the plains. Ahead of her, in the West, is a great darkness populated by wild animals. There are bears and wolves and Indian people, who are fleeing her light. In her wake come farms, villages and homesteads and in the back are cities and railroads. As the figure progresses across the land, the light of civilization dispels the darkness of ignorance and barbarity. In this painting, American Indian people are portrayed along with the animals and the darkness. They have to be removed before Columbia can bring the prosperity promised to the United States. It's an interesting portrayal and very symbolic of the thinking of many Americans during the mid-19th century.” From “Native American Displacement Amid U.S. Expansion” by R. David Edmunds.

Select one of the people in the painting. Image you are that person. What are you thinking? Feeling? Why are you doing what you are doing? Write a story from the point of view of the person about what is happening and answer the questions.